(a) whether Government have taken a final decision on the proposal to enhance the wage ceiling for coverage under the EPF and MP Act; and

(b) if so, what are the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (DR. SATYANARAYAN JATIYA): (a)Yes, Sir.

(b) The wage ceiling for coverage has been raised from Rs. 5000/- to Rs. 6500/- per month under the Employees Provident Funds & Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 *with effect from* 1.6.2001.

MoU with Myanmar to maintain Tamu-Kalewa Road

*74. PROF. (SHRIMATI) BHARATI RAY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Myanmar for maintenance of 160 km long Tamu-Kalemyo-Kalewa Road;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) by when MoU would be operative for the benefit of people of both the countries?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (c) A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Government of the Union of Myanmar and the Government of the Republic of India on cooperation in the maintenance of the Tamu-Kalemyo road was signed on 25th May, 2001 in Yangon. Under this MoU the Government of India has the responsibility for the maintenance of the road for the first six years by providing the services of an Indian Road Maintenance Force along with necessary materials, equipment and manpower.

The MoU entered into force from the date of its signing *i.e.* from 25th May, 2001.

Computerisation of Passport Offices

*75. SHRI K. C. KONDAIAH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Passport Offices functioning in the country;

(b) the number of Passport Offices which are fully computerised;

(c) whether Bangalore Passport Office has been fully computerised and streamlined;

(d) if not, the steps proposed to be taken to fully computerise the Bangalore Passport Office; and

(e) the number of Passport Offices which have started the on-line passport information system in the country?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) 28 Passport Offices are functioning in the country.

(b) 25 Passport Offices are computerised.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) Does not arise.

(e) 14 Passport Offices have websites which provide online information on the passport issue procedure and allow for status check of passport applications.

Decentralised system of food procurement

*76. DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) the progress made thus far in implementing the new decentralised system of food procurement;

(b) the advantages likely to accrue from the new system as against the FCI based centralised system of procurement; and

(c) the State Governments' reaction to the new system?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHANTA KUMAR): (a) Decentralised system of procurement of foodgrains is in operation in three States at present. These States are Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

(b) Decentralised system of procurement has the following advantages:—

(i) Local farmers would get the Minimum Support Price.